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UNCLAS ALMATY 003455

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ROUNDDUP,
OCTOBER 4

1. (U) This is the third in a series of weekly election roundups, in advance of Kazakhstan's December 4, 2005 presidential elections. Items were drawn primarily from the local press and media.

Pre-Registration of Candidates

2. (U) As of October 4, the Central Election Commission (CEC) had received 18 applications for registration from would-be candidates for presidency. Five have been disqualified for failing to pass the Kazakh proficiency test. Thirteen candidates have met the requirements for candidacy. Before October 3 the would-be candidates have to collect about 85,000 signatures in support of their candidacy. The registration of successful would-be candidates will last from October 3 to October 24. The election campaign will start on October 25.

3. (SBU) As of October 4, Tuyakbay had collected more than 160,000 signatures. According to Tuyakbay, local authorities were putting obstacles in the way of his team's signature collection efforts by intimidating the collectors and forcing the electorate to give false information to the collectors. Tuyakbay also complained about the broad coverage the press and electronic media was giving to President Nazarbayev.

4. (U) On September 29 CEC chairman Onalsyn Zhumabekov rebuked Tuyakbay for alleging that the authorities encouraged many candidates to run for presidency. Zhumabekov said: "It is absolutely an incorrect statement. According to the constitution, any eligible person may run for presidency."

Election Preparations

5. (U) The CEC continued with its routine procedures in preparation for the elections. On September 28, the earlier approved rules for pre-election campaigning in the media were published. The CEC also announced its final decision on the use of e-voting at 1475 of 9697 precincts, about 16 per cent of all regional (oblast) centers including the cities of Almaty, Astana, Semipalatinsk, Zhezkazgan, Ekibastuz, Temirtau and Rudny. The decision was made in spite of objections by opposition parties.

6. (U) The CEC issued a resolution to increase cooperation with media outlets in order to provide equal access to information and unbiased coverage of the elections and will operate a press center at the CEC. At the same time the CEC imposed closer control over media publications on elections with an ad hoc group set up at the CEC responsible for monitoring the media.

7. (U) The CEC also announced its decision that all candidates will be required to keep their campaign funds in Halyk Bank. Earlier, FJK leader Zharmakhan Tuyakbay filed a lawsuit against the CEC for choosing Halyk Bank without holding a tender as required by law. The Supreme Court dismissed the lawsuit and the CEC reaffirmed its decision to use Halyk Bank.

Opposition Raises Illegal Privatizations

8. (U) At an Almaty press conference on September 22, the leaders of the For a Just Kazakhstan opposition block raised the issue of the alleged illegal privatization of many of Kazakhstan's major enterprises in the late 1990s. According to an anti-corruption commission set up by the opposition block, enterprises illegally privatized in 1997 included the major copper giant "Balkhashmys" and Dzhezkazgan City power supply company. In addition, the opposition urged the government to purchase the Shymkent refinery from PetroKazakhstan and 51% of its shares before permitting the sale of the company to the Chinese CNPC oil giant. The opposition leaders also suggested that the sale of 49% of shares of KazMunayGas subsidiary "Exploration and Extraction" should be suspended.

Parties Support Nazarbayev

19. (SBU) President Nazarbayev appears to be using the nomination campaign as an opportunity for more informal campaigning around the country. On September 23, the Civic Party held its party meeting in Pavlodar, and on September 28, the Agrarian party in Petropavlovsk announced it would formally nominate Nazarbayev as their candidate. President Nazarbayev attended both meetings, which took on the air of well-funded rallies in support of his candidacy. The smaller Aul and Patriots' parties, along with a number of public organizations ranging from the Union of Writers to the Trade Union of Communication Workers, also announced their support of Nazarbayev candidacy. According to the Otan leader Bakhytzhan Zhumagulov, over 170 organizations have joined the Kazakhstan People's Coalition in support of Nazarbayev.

Parliament

10. (SBU) Parliamentarians are becoming more involved in this campaign than in previous years. On September 28, leaders of pro-presidential parties met with MPs to encourage them to serve as Nazarbayev's formal representatives in the December 4 elections. Otan's acting leader Zhumagulov has assured MPs that this is allowed by current legislation. They can work closely with the electorate and disclose and resolve potential problems. The majority of Mazhilis members reportedly showed eagerness take on this role. Following Dariga Nazarbayeva's call that the elections should be used as a powerful instrument for the implementation of MPs' own agenda - construction of housing and roads, water supply, etc. - MPs began with debate on the draft 2006 national budget.

11. (U) A few voices in Parliament have come out in support of the opposition. Member of the Mazhilis Tokhtar Aubakirov issued a statement criticizing Vremya Print for refusing to print opposition newspapers without any explanation or notice. MP Aubakirov formally requested that Minister of Culture, Information and Sports Yeset Kosubayev look into this incident of "an information blockade" of candidates and violation of media and election legislation. In a surprising move, Tokhtarkhan Nurakhmetov, one of the initiators of the recent national security amendments and the NGO legislation, called on his colleagues to treat all candidates with due respect.

Criticism of the Opposition

12. (U) There has been significant criticism of opposition parties by the CEC and pro-presidential parties. CEC Chairman Zhumabekov and Otan leader Zhumagulov criticized Tuyakbay's statement that the nomination of many candidates was set up by the government. On September 28, Mazhilis member Mikhail Troshikhin alleged that FJK was bribing voters in order to obtain signatures in support of Tuyakbay. On September 29, three Almaty students held a press conference to allege that they were forced to participate in opposition meetings by threats and deceit.

Mass Media Charter for a Fair Election

13. (U) Twenty two pro-government mass media outlets, including Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Yegemendy Kazakstan national daily newspapers, and Khabar and Kazakhstan TV channels (broadcasting nationwide), have signed a mass media charter committing:

- to prevent the use of "dirty" political technologies and compromising warfare,
- to contribute to holding free and fair election,
- to conduct professional activities in accordance with current legislation and ethical norms of civic society,
- to provide every candidate with an equal opportunity to express his(her) point of view,
- to prevent the dissemination of derogatory information that damages the dignity and honor of candidates,
- to prevent the use of election technologies in the interest of political extremists and criminals,
- to follow the principle that it is the voter's job to make a choice, and
- to only provide factual materials and not force their own opinions or assessments.

Opposition Papers Lose Printing House

14. (U) On September 28, the editors-in-chiefs of opposition newspapers Svododa Slova, Epokha, Apta-kz, Pravda Kazakhstan, Zhuma-Times, Soz, and Azat newspapers

announced a hunger strike in protest of the private Vremya printing house's sudden cancellations of their contracts. The opposition saw the cancellation as a politically motivated step in the run-up to the presidential election. In response, two printing houses, Daur and Asia-press, offered their services. On September 29 the opposition newspapers' editors-in-chiefs reached an agreement with Svetlana Nazarbayeva, the director of government-controlled Daur Printing House.

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